

“Allama Mashraqi’s life — his message to the world” Nasim Yousaf

In Memory of Allama Mashriqi

On his 41st Death Anniversary

By Nasim Yousaf

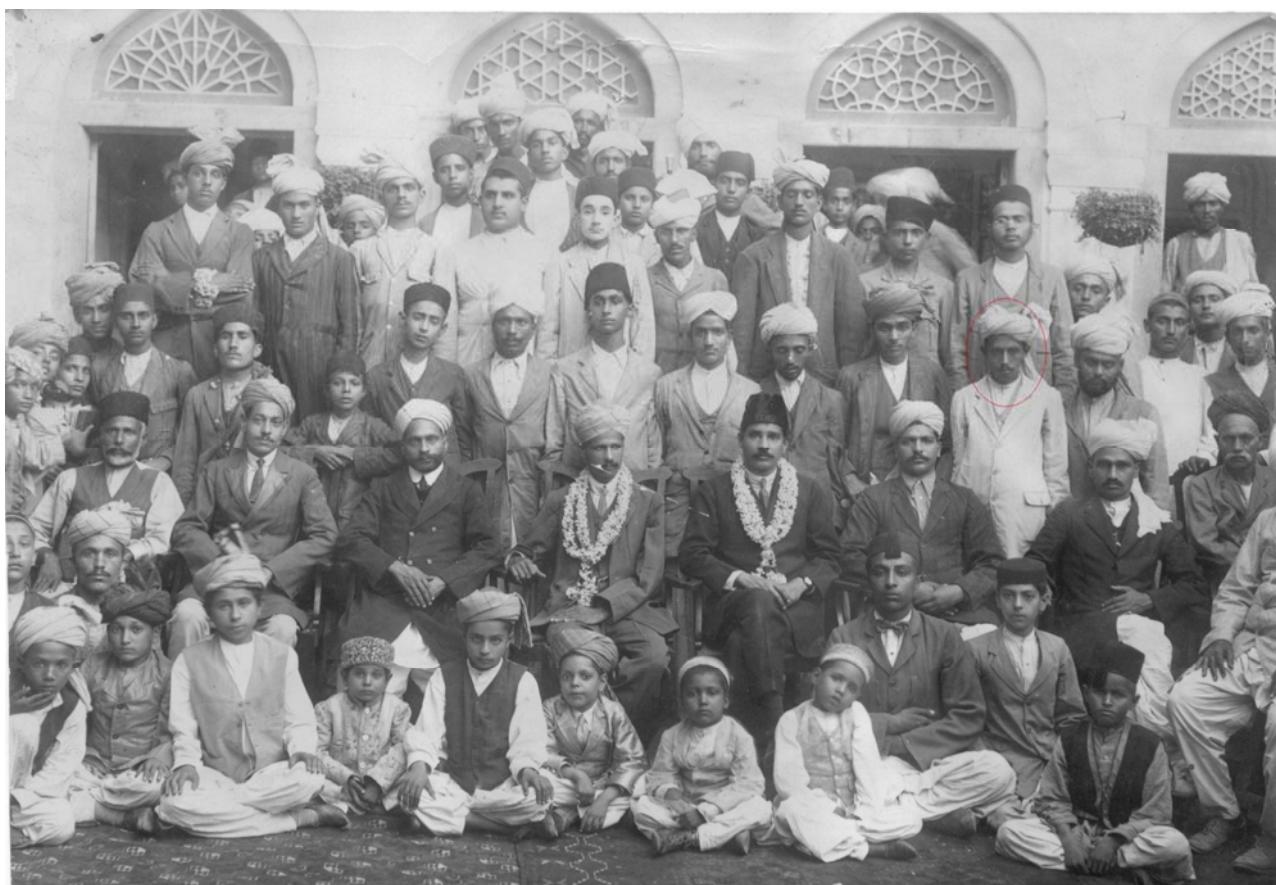


Photo taken at Peshawar (Pakistan) around 1920's. Allama Mashriqi is sitting in the center with black cap and garlands around his neck.* (photo courtesy: M. Naeem Akhtar)

Allama Mashriqi was born in a very well placed and respected family of India. He was born to a Rajput family in Amritsar on August 25, 1888 and died in Lahore on August 27, 1963. Mashriqi's father, Khan Ata Mohammad Khan was a very well educated person and a man of means. Khan Ata inherited large property from his father. During the Mughal Empire, Khan Ata Mohammad Khan's predecessors held prominent positions. Khan Ata was a highly regarded and well-connected person with the Muslim luminaries of the time such as Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Jamal Ud Din Afghani, Shibli Noamani, and

Mirza Ghalib. Mashriqi's father himself was a literary person and a great writer. He owned a bi-weekly, Vakil, from Amritsar. This publication was an avenue for discussing political issues and re-awakening the Muslims. The quality of this publication can be judged by the fact that Maulana Shibli Naomani requested Khan Ata Mohammad Khan to let Maulana Abul Kalam Azad work at Vakil, so that Maulana Azad could refine his literary knowledge under the guidance of Khan Ata Mohammad Khan. Abul Kalam Azad went on to work as an editor of Vakil. Hence, Mashriqi was raised in an environment that was surrounded by highly literate and educated people. Khan Ata Mohammad Khan noticed the genius in his son and he guided him accordingly.

Allama Mashriqi, a born genius, liked reading from his childhood. As an extremely brilliant and confident boy, he was famous amongst his teachers and friends. He completed his Masters degree in Mathematics from the University of the Punjab at the age of 19 and broke all previous records. The Indian press was full of praise for him. As a brilliant student at the Punjab University, Mashriqi went on to Christ's College of the Cambridge University (England) to distinguish himself in Mathematics and emerged as a renowned Mathematician and scholar. He again broke records and completed four Triposes with distinction in various subjects within five years. The British press media, impressed with Mashriqi's educational accomplishments at Cambridge University, paid rich tributes to him. It is believed that his records at Cambridge University are yet to be broken. He completed his education in England in 1912 and returned to India. Upon his return, at the age of 25, he was appointed Vice Principal of Islamia College by Chief Commissioner Sir George Roos-Keppel (at that time, Chief Commissioner was equivalent to Governor). He was made Principal of the same college in 1917. As a result of his outstanding abilities, he was appointed Under Secretary, Government of India in the Education Department. Sir George Anderson (1876-1943) had held this position prior to Mashriqi's appointment. It is interesting to note that Sir George Anderson was much older to Mashriqi when he had held this position. Mashriqi was directly appointed Vice Principal of Islamia College and Under Secretary, when he was only 25 years and 29 years old, respectively. This speaks to his outstanding caliber, competence, and abilities. Furthermore, he was offered Ambassadorship of Afghanistan at age 32 and title of Sir at age 33, but he declined both. It is believed that he was the youngest Indian to be offered and to hold important positions.

In 1924, at the age of 36, Mashriqi completed his book, Tazkirah. This monumental work was highly praised and was nominated for the Nobel Prize. At such an early age, few can achieve the distinction of producing a book that earns worldwide praise. Mashriqi emerged as a great scholar and a prolific writer. Mashriqi's list of achievements does not end there. He soon emerged as a fine organizer, reformer, leader, an excellent orator, a great philosopher, a thinker, and a visionary. He became one of the most prominent personalities and political leaders of India, with great wisdom and political foresight. He was a truly brave and fervent freedom fighter.

In order to lift the masses and bring freedom to India, Mashriqi resigned from Government service and laid the foundation of the Khaksar Tehrik (Khaksar Movement) in 1930. The Khaksars went from house to house to mobilize the nation to rise for

freedom. Their message was appealing and the masses came forward to join the Movement. As part of their daily activities, the Khaksars paraded in playgrounds, streets, and neighborhoods. These parades also became a source of recruitment and mobilized people for the cause. Khaksar training camps, as directed by the Khaksar command, were also held in various parts of India. Khaksar activities became the talk of the town throughout the entire sub-continent; this phenomenon, the nation collectively rising up, had never been witnessed and was unique in the history of India. No other Movement in India had achieved so much success in such a short period of time. The Khaksar Tehrik had become the most organized and powerful movement of the time. Indeed, the Movement successfully mobilized the nation to demand freedom and jolted the nation from its deep slumber.

By 1940, the Khaksar Tehrik was at its peak and its manifold growth seemed unstoppable. Millions of people throughout the entire India were now Khaksars or Khaksar sympathizers and supporters. By the mid-1940s, the Khaksar headquarters had announced the enlisting of another 2.5 million Khaksars (in addition to over four million Khaksars who had already joined). Unfortunately, the tremendous growth of the Movement was unacceptable to the opponents of the Khaksar Tehrik. On February 28, 1940 the Punjab Premier (Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, also a Muslim Leaguer) imposed restrictions on Khaksar activities in order to safeguard his political interests and to please the rulers. In protest, the Khaksars paraded on March 19, 1940 in Lahore (a few days prior to the historic Muslim League session of March 22-24, 1940 where the Pakistan Resolution and the Khaksar Resolution were passed). Police opened fire on the marching Khaksars and many of them were killed or injured. Mashriqi and thousands of other Khaksars were arrested. Mashriqi's son was killed and his other sons were arrested during a raid at the Khaksar headquarters. A complete ban was imposed on the Movement. However, the Government's ban was too late as the Khaksars had already mobilized the Indians during the past ten years to seek freedom. After 1940, the momentum for seeking independence grew even stronger. Even though Mashriqi and the Khaksars were in jail, their suffering was driving the Indians towards independence. And free Khaksars were continuously working for the cause in their respective localities and cities throughout India.

In jail, Mashriqi was told that he must abandon the Movement, or else suffer in detention. Mashriqi refused to abandon the Movement and was thus kept in jail without a trial in extremely poor conditions. Nevertheless, Mashriqi did not succumb to the pressure and remained steadfast and devoted to the Movement. Ultimately, Mashriqi had to fast for 80 days to obtain his and the Khaksars' release from jail. Facing tremendous public pressure and with Mashriqi on the brink of death, the Government finally honorably released Mashriqi from Vellore Jail on January 19, 1942. Though Mashriqi was liberated, his movements remained restricted to the Madras Presidency*. However, Mashriqi continued his struggle for freedom, despite the odds against him. His followers carried his directives forward to every soul they came across. They passed the message to remain steadfast and that nothing short of a free India would be acceptable. Upon the arrival of Sir Stafford Cripps in India on March 23, 1942, Mashriqi sent him a telegram and demanded the complete independence of the entire India. Mashriqi also sent a message to other leaders,

including Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and offered them his complete support in this regard.

The restrictions on Mashriqi's movements were withdrawn on December 28, 1942. On January 02, 1943, he arrived in New Delhi (from Madras) and addressed a massive crowd that had gathered to welcome him at the Delhi railway station. After his release, Mashriqi continued his rigorous work towards independence.

Thus, Allama Mashriqi played a vital role in directing the Muslims towards the independence of India, ultimately leading to the creation of Pakistan. During the struggle movement, Mashriqi, his family, and a large number of Khaksars heavily suffered and many Khaksars lost their lives. His life story and that of the Khaksar Movement is extremely exhilarating and moving. It guides and inspires readers, instilling a spirit of patriotism and love for the common man. It also influences leaders to adopt simplicity, provide selfless service to the nation, and lift the masses. In his lifetime Mashriqi was offered various high posts, but he turned them down, as he believed in principled politics and would not compromise his beliefs. This short introduction does not do justice to the superb and manifold personality of Mashriqi, a great visionary and freedom fighter.

It is unfortunate that no serious efforts have been made by the Government of Pakistan to enlighten the public about the tremendous services of Mashriqi and the Khaksars towards independence and for the people of Pakistan. I have disclosed many previously unknown facts about Pakistan history in my books, published in the USA under the following titles: (a) "Allama Mashriqi & Dr. Akhtar Hameed Khan: Two Legends of Pakistan", (b) "Pakistan's Freedom & Allama Mashriqi". These books will hopefully enlighten the people of Pakistan about the ways in which Allama Mashriqi and the Khaksars' role towards freedom has been ignored in the history books of Pakistan. Mashriqi is ignored because he criticized Muslim League policies. However, critics forget that his criticism was only to correct the wrongs, and he otherwise felt no personal enmity toward the Muslim League or its leadership. The media has also thus far ignored Mashriqi and the Khaksars for reasons known only to them. The media has a great responsibility in this regard and they must highlight everyone's point of view. If Pakistan is to progress as a nation, it needs to develop a culture of tolerance towards differing viewpoints.

It is a known fact that no freedom has been achieved without the sacrifices of human lives and in the process people have had to face brutalities. In the fight for liberty, leaders and followers are imprisoned and go through the sufferings and ordeals associated with any independence. Mashriqi and the Khaksars suffered the most and paid the price for independence. History is witness to fact that Mashriqi and the Khaksars' services for mobilizing the masses and the resistance that resulted in obtaining autonomy are unparalleled. Pakistan's history is distorted and incomplete as it fails to acknowledge and discuss the struggles of Allama Mashriqi and the Khaksars.

Thus, I once again strongly urge the Pakistan government to make immediate arrangements for creating a dedicated research center under the name "Allama Mashriqi Research Academy" (AMRA). This Academy would collect and publish Khaksar

materials and make them available to public and research libraries within and outside the country. As I have repeatedly stated, a lot of Khaksar materials have already vanished and many important contemporaries of Allama Mashriqi have died. Time is passing very quickly and these steps need to be taken immediately to secure Pakistan's national heritage and history. If action is not taken soon, Pakistan's history will forever remain incomplete. God willing, my voice will be heard; if not today, then indeed one day in the future.

May God bless Pakistan and its people.

Nasim Yousaf is a scholar and historian who has presented papers at U.S. conferences and written many articles and books. He has also contributed articles to the "Harvard Asia Quarterly" and the "World History Encyclopedia (USA)." His forthcoming book, "Mahatma Gandhi & My Grandfather, Allama Mashriqi," discusses the role of Mashriqi and Gandhi in the freedom movement, their political differences, and the true driving force behind the liberation of British India in 1947.

Copyright © 2004 Nasim Yousaf.

Article appeared in:

The Statesman, Peshawar, Pakistan, dated August 28, 2004

* Photo also appeared in: *Government of British India on Allama Mashraqi and Khaksar Tehreek (Movement): A Select Chronology; A descriptive timeline of the correspondence of the Secretary of State, Viceroy of India, Provincial Governors, and high officials, intelligence reports, and other events (Focal Period: 1930s and 40s).*

Author: Nasim Yousaf

* Under British rule, most of south India was integrated into a region called the Madras Presidency. In 1956, the Madras Presidency was disbanded and Tamil Nadu was established.